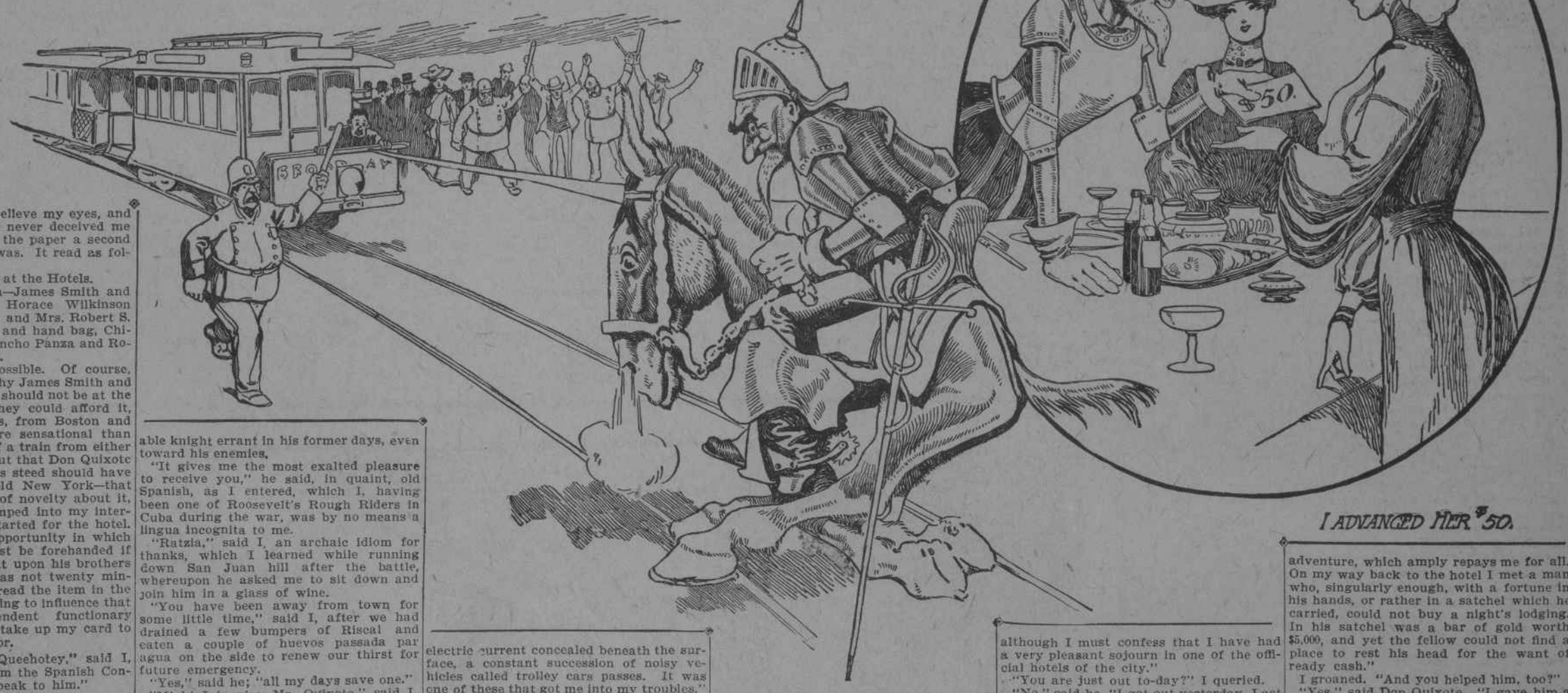
DON QUIXOTE IN TOWN

The Distinguished Knight of La Mancha makes a brief Sojourn in the Metropolis

BY JOHN KENDRICK BANGS



I ADVANCED HER $50.

IT was difficult to believe my eyes, and yet, since they had never deceived me before, I looked at the paper a second time, and there it was. It read as follows:—

New Arrivals at the Hotels.

Walledoff-Castoria—James Smith and wife, Topeka, Kan.; Horace Wilkinson Bunkerill, Boston; Mr. and Mrs. Robert S. Peters, three children and hand bag, Chicago; Don Quixote, Sancho Panza and Rosinante, of La Mancha.

It hardly seemed possible. Of course, there was no reason why James Smith and wife, of Topeka, Kan., should not be at the Walledoff, provided they could afford it, and the other arrivals, from Boston and Chicago, were no more sensational than would be the arrival of a train from either city four hours late; but that Don Quixote with his squire and his steed should have ventured into little old New York—that had certain elements of novelty about it, and I immediately jumped into my interviewing clothes and started for the hotel. Surely here was an opportunity in which a newspaper man must be forehanded if he would secure a beat upon his brothers in the business. It was not twenty minutes from the time I read the item in the paper before I was trying to influence that affluent and independent functionary known as "Front" to take up my card to the distinguished visitor.

"Just say to Don Queehotey," said I, "that a gentleman from the Spanish Consul's office wants to speak to him."

"Don Keehoo?" he asked.

"Don Queehotey," said I.

"Nobody of that name here, sir," he remarked. "How do you spell it?"

"Q-u-i-x-o-t-e," said I.

"Oh, youse mean de tall slim dago with the horse. We call him Mr. Quickoats," said the boy. "I'll see if he's in."

The boy left me and I sat down in the writing room and waited patiently. In a few moments the boy returned.

"He's out," he observed. "That is, he is and he isn't out. Fact is, he's over on the Island for thirty days, but as he paid in advance we are holding his rooms for him."

"On the Island? You mean Blackwell's?" I cried.

"Yes," said the boy. "Ever been there? It's a favorite resort of some folk."

I confessed my lack of experience in insular matter and returned home.

Don Quixote on the Island! Surely here was a story that was worth having, and I resolved to follow it up, and I did. That was just thirty days ago, and it is only to-night that I have the full details of the famous Don's adventures in my hands. Despite my repeated efforts to get at him during the month of July I was greeted always with the same answer:—

"The prisoner will be glad to see you on his return to his hotel. Until then he is too busy to receive callers." Last night, thirty-one days having elapsed since I first read of his arrival, I again called and was delighted to find that the knight had returned and would be pleased to receive me.

He has not changed in appearance with the passing of the years since that immortal scribe Cervantes wrote the history of his prowess, and I should have recognized him instantly in a crowd, because of his likeness to Sir Henry Irving in the rôle of Malvolio. Moreover, there was in his welcome that rare grace and genial warmth of manner which was always the distinguishing characteristic of this venerable knight errant in his former days, even toward his enemies.

"It gives me the most exalted pleasure to receive you," he said, in quaint, old Spanish, as I entered, which I, having been one of Roosevelt's Rough Riders in Cuba during the war, was by no means a lingua incognita to me.

"Ratzia," said I, an archaic idiom for thanks, which I learned while running down San Juan hill after the battle, whereupon he asked me to sit down and join him in a glass of wine.

"You have been away from town for some little time," said I, after we had drained a few bumpers of Riscal and eaten a couple of huevos passada par agua on the side to renew our thirst for future emergency.

"Yes," said he; "all my days save one."

"Might I inquire, Mr. Quixote," said I, "how you came to get thirty days on the Island?"

"Certainly you might," returned the Don, courteously. "I have no objection to your knowing the whole story. You see, it was just thirty-one days ago that, with my valet, Sancho, and my horse, Rosinante, I arrived in New York. I had heard great tales about the vast sums of money that are to be made at your race tracks, and finding myself rather short of pocket I decided to bring Rosinante over and enter her in the Suburban, or perhaps arrange a private contest for her with McChesney or Gunfire, or any other meritorious steed in the lists, in the hope of establishing again my fallen fortunes."

"A most interesting proposition," said I. "Rosinante has a record at running?"

"Rosinante is a steed of all gaits," said Don Quixote, proudly. "She can trot, pace, lope, run, amble or sidle. I'll back her against the world for sidling, and I am willing to entertain any reasonable offer for a race in any other gait that may be made. On the La Mancha track she loped a mile in twenty-three minutes when only twenty-one years old, and in private practice, ridden by my valet and jockey, Sancho Panza, who weighs 350 pounds, she has dashed a hundred yards in forty-five seconds."

"That's great business," said I. "I advise you to take her down to Sheepshead Bay and give an exhibition run."

"I hope to arrange it," said he, "but I find great difficulty in keeping my freedom in your city, as my thirty days' incarceration on your beautiful but too populous island will prove. The evening of my arrival here, after supper, it occurred to me that Rosinante would be the better for a little exercise, and we sallied forth for the Central Park. In some way or another we soon found ourselves on a street called Broadway, upon which there run, as you may be aware, two parallel metal lines of track over which, propelled by an electric current concealed beneath the surface, a constant succession of noisy vehicles called trolley cars passes. It was one of these that got me into my troubles."

"That is no new situation," said I.

"You see, when I had asked the gendarme on the corner of Thirty-fourth street to direct me to the Park," Don Quixote continued, "the man told me to follow that line of track until I came to a large open space full of trees and redolent of gasolene. 'That,' said he, 'is the Central Park.' The scent of gasolene, he informed me, came, not from the flowers, but from the automobiles which now occupy the playground of the people. Well, I followed his instructions, guided Rosinante across the square to the right hand track going north, and started to follow it. All went well for about a quarter of a mile, when Rosinante, being somewhat weary from her travels from La Mancha, evinced a desire to sit down for a few moments."

"What more natural!" I ejaculated. "A horse is only human. Why shouldn't she want to sit down and rest?"

"'Twas so I reasoned," said Don Quixote, nibbling off the end of a pollo grille. "I knew what the poor beast had been through and did not urge her to continue further without rest, when all of a sudden from behind us there came a terrific clanging of a bell. It was the most impertinent clanging of a bell that I had ever heard, but I had no idea that it was intended for us, and so paid no attention to it. Nor did Rosinante. She merely sat more firmly back and gazed calmly about her upon the brilliantly lighted scene all around us. I had never seen anything like it before, nor had Rosinante, and we stood—or rather I stood; she sat—enraptured, when that infernal clanging of the bell began again, and I found almost directly upon us a long line of those noisy cars. This I should not have minded had not a burly ruffian on the front platform of the car nearest us used language toward me and my unoffending horse which even in Spanish I should hesitate to repeat."

"You don't need to," said I. "I've heard 'em."

"I immediately retorted in a dignified fashion, but was greeted before I had half finished by another flood of most objectionable terms, and then, would you believe it," cried my host, his face flushing at the memory of the insult, "the fellow on the car started his vehicle along and bumped, yes, actually bumped, Rosinante on her hindquarters, to the intense humiliation of my precious steed and to my own very great indignation."

"I don't wonder you were mad!" I put in. "Those fellows are utterly without polish."

"Well, I couldn't stand it," cried Don Quixote, rising up and angrily pacing the floor. "It was the work of an instant to jerk Rosinante to her feet, of another to mount the saddle, when turning swiftly, and with lance well poised, I charged upon the car. In an instant all was confusion. The offensive motorman dodged the point of my weapon and the lance, passing through the open door, down through the length of the car, prodded the conductor, who was standing on the rear platform, in the stomach, and before I was even allowed to apologize the police were upon me. You know the rest. I was haled into court and accused of disorderly conduct. By an outrageously swift proceeding my trial was rushed through at breakneck speed, and the honorable justice, being either unable or unwilling to credit my story, sentenced me to pay a fine of thirty dollars or to spend its equivalent in days upon the Island."

"What an outrage!" I cried.

"Of course, in view of the fact that I have come here to make money and not to spend it," said Don Quixote, "I chose the latter alternative."

"You have had a hard time," said I, "and I see that the hour is hardly ripe for me to ask you your impressions of America."

"Well," he said with a rare smile, "I do not judge from my experience so far that it is well called the Land of Liberty, although I must confess that I have had a very pleasant sojourn in one of the official hotels of the city."

"You are just out to-day?" I queried.

"No," said he, "I got out yesterday. Last night I went to one of your roof gardens. The city is filled with dulcineas."

"Very true," said I.

"And full of opportunity for a man of knightly inclinations, but, alas, the age is an expensive one," said the Don.

"You speak from experience?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "I do. I came to the rescue of several young ladies in distress last evening. One whom I encountered on leaving the roof garden told me that she had not partaken of food for ten days. She was richly clad, but her story was convincing. Her family were out of town and she had lost their address, and she was utterly without funds. I took her to a nearby restaurant and relieved her hunger, but oh, at what a cost! The check was for $26.35. It is true that, feeling hungry myself, I also partook of the repast, but then—$26.35 is a deal of money to pay for two portions of food. Nor was that all. By an odd coincidence one of my companion's most intimate friends, whom she had not seen in ten years, wandered in, as we were about to finish our dinner, in the most acute distress. She was intending to return to her home in Chicago on the midnight train, and lost her pocketbook, containing every penny she had, and what was worse, her return ticket. There she was stranded in New York, six thousand miles from home, and penniless."

"And you?" I cried.

"What could a gentleman do?" he asked me gravely. "There was but one thing. I advanced her $50 to get home with. She very honorably gave me a receipt in full for the money. She wanted to give me a receipt for $100 as additional security, but of course I could not hear of such a thing, and the poor creatures, the hungry one fed, her sister in misfortune provided with the wherewithal to return to her distant home, left me."

"That was your experience for one evening, eh?" said I.

"Very nearly," said he. "I had one more adventure, which amply repays me for all. On my way back to the hotel I met a man who, singularly enough, with a fortune in his hands, or rather in a satchel which he carried, could not buy a night's lodging. In his satchel was a bar of gold worth $5,000, and yet the fellow could not find a place to rest his head for the want of ready cash."

I groaned. "And you helped him, too?"

"Yes," said Don Quixote. "I gave him a hundred dollar bill and took the bar of gold for security. He is to call for it to-night, and with him is coming his banker, who is to give him cash for his metal, and I am to be rewarded for this mere chance kindness with a certified check for $500. Not bad, eh?"

But never a reply made I. Overcome by my emotions, I fled from the room down the staircase into the street.

As a New Yorker, I had not the courage to look the kindly knight errant in the face.

Meanwhile, I have telegraphed my friend Mr. Easymark, of Lonelyville, to hasten back to town and look after his relative, for if he doesn't I greatly fear that when Mr. Quixote tries to return to La Mancha he will have to pawn his horse Rosinante to do it, and that, I suspect, would kill even so immortal a soul as he has become.

Local Color.

Tuller wrote a bloody story,
Bright and red and very gory—
(Gory? Yes, an allegory)—
More he sent it out the more he
Got it back and he was sorry.

Editors kept writing Tuller,
"It's too bright, it should be duller,"
And, "It needs more local color."

So he cut out all the brightness,
All the sun and all the lightness,
All the cleanness and the whiteness.

So it chanced that by the time he
Sent it out it was quite grimy,
Smoke bedaubed and somewhat slimy,
"There!" triumphantly cried Tuller,
"That's Chicago's local color."

ELLIS PARKER BUTLER.

Cupid: Flower Boy.---By Melville Chater.

YOU, gentlemen, have often watched the royal progress of James down the avenue, as he sat, spick and span, with squared arms and ramrod pose, beside the liveried driver, atop of a gorgeous wagon, purple, with silver trimmings, behind a smart, glossily harnessed white team. You, fair ladies, have watched flutteringly from your windows the imposing approach of James, his dignified descent, his soldierly dealings with the maid, and have thrilled with the correctness, the discipline, the chastened glory of it all, as you tore off the tissue paper and exclaimed, sniffing, "Oh, aren't they dear!"

Such qualities are the very foundations of James' house—not shop. To James they came as painfully reared pinnacles. When he first reported for duty, a baggy kneed novice with cheerful grin, nicotined fingers and defiant tufts of tow hair, he gave his name as Jamesey.

"James," corrected the manager, coldly. He unfolded the inflexible traditions of the house—uniform, shoes and hair irreproachably brushed, linen immaculate, spine stiff, arms squared, eyes front, and unfailing respect to patrons, not customers.

James hearkened, abashed. He tried, too, but laundering counts up, especially when your little brothers and sisters cannot be reckoned on both hands, and your weekly salary can be reckoned easily on one. Also, James had not been born with a perked nose and winkable eye for nothing. He persisted in mouthy stares, entertained patrons with appalling levity, and snickered upon the faintest provocation. On route he scandalized the driver by alighting with cake walk steps and whistling sentimental ballads through his teeth. Reformation was as tedious a process as would have been the extraction of his wink or the depression of the perk in his nose.

The manager believed that James meant well. Yet it was distinctly humiliating, one day, when a pop eyed, pigtailed young person entered, staring awedly about the great, green, electric lit bower, and faltered that when Jamesey Quinn went out for dinner, now, would he ask him to stop around to Heinrich's—glove counter—to see some one? Just some one.

The manager raised James' conscientiously plastered hair. Some one never called again, but Joseph and William jealously observed that James' dinner hour was more often a dinner-hour-and-a-quarter. They gloated privily upon the end of evil ways, perceiving a Damoclean blade suspended over James' plastered hair.

One Monday morning James, instead of recounting the delights of Coney and balladizing through his teeth, ascended the wagon with a heavy sigh. All day he sat dumb, his sprightliness wilted, his assurance crushed, his stolid face, squared arms and stiff spine but empty mummeries.

Hickey, at the reins, observed that the Boss must have been combing James' hair, but urged him not to take it too hard, as he did need toning down, as you might say. James only sighed, staring distantly, as though discerning, far off, unhappy things.

For a week consolations were vain, then he began to mend. His dress and deportment were beyond suspicion; he was soberly cheerful, but his wink had fled and even the perk in his nose seemed subdued. His sole lapse was on the morning of Heinrich Brothers' fire, when he ran out to watch the ambulances pass and forgot to return for an hour. Hickey judged that the Boss must have combed James' hair afresh, for he made the afternoon trip very wan and nerveless, and for the rest of the week his was the face of one who realizes that he has done, left undone, and there is no health in him.

One morning the wagon started half an hour earlier than usual. James was obliged to spend most of his dinner hour at work in the packing room, and that afternoon he was given a new route on an unusually full wagon. There was also unusual indecorum on the part of young ladies; many rushed down stairs before the maid had fairly opened the door, and some opened the door themselves. James questioned his driver listlessly.

HEAD HUNG, FUMBLING HIS CAP AND SHUFFLING HIS FEET.

Kelly, a bachelor, had not delivered flowers for twenty years without becoming a trifle cynical.

"Oh," he sniffed, "it's what-you-call-it Day—Valentine's, an' every feller who's scrapped with his girl gets a chance to try a feeler. You see, he don't have to put his pasteboard in the box. She knows where it comes from, all right, an' if it don't come, she knows it's all off. Say, a wagonful o' vylets, which stands fer love, an' nine-tenths of 'em standin' fer red hot scraps! Funny, ain't it?"

James said it was, and sighed.

To cheer him Kelly got out his tally sheet and explained the raison d'etre of every bunch. This one was a regular weekly, and represented an engagement; that was a three times weekly, and represented, he guessed, a would be engagement. Here was a monthly, and a newly married couple, to whose wedding Kelly had carried the decorations. All those there used to be weeklies, and represented the making up of scraps as sure as James was a foot high.

A bit further on, he concluded, James was to get out and deliver Haight's roses, while he, Kelly, would make two stops down a side street and overtake him. Haight was No. 812, right near St. Catherine's.

James glanced up. "St. Catherine's," he repeated.

"Hospital," explained Kelly. "North end of the block."

For a long while James sat stiff and silent. Suddenly he asked:—

"Which gets the most?"

"Oh, Dainton. She's good for near every day. First time this week, though. Here we are."

After a prolonged rummage behind the wagon James started off, while Kelly wheeled westward, hoping that Dainton's man would ultimately shake her, as she ought to have taken him on long ago.

She, standing cloaked and gloved at an upper window, was debating the reverse. There was no earthly reason why he should send them at all, if he didn't want to, but if he did——. She finger nailed a whole row on the calendar, then glanced in the mirror for reassurance. Besides, he knew that it was visiting day at St. Catherine's, and her night at the opera, and certainly he knew, or should know, that to-day was—To-day! She capitalized the word in an indignant burst, then glanced out for the tenth time that half hour—to behold the familiar purple and silver wagon.

She sent the maid to the door. Presently, hearing the driver's voice in prolonged explanation, she descended the staircase with dignity.

He advanced, apologizing that her violets should have been forgotten. The boy must have overlooked them when loading the wagon.

She crushed his assurances of a special messenger with a haughty "I shall see it is reported," and swept past into the street.

The third blunder that month. Such carelessness! And, of all days, on that day! Utterly inexcusable! And after she had waited half an hour and put on that particular gown! She would see the boy was well reprimanded. And she bit her lip, horribly positive that, dressed as she was, in that particular gown, she would appear to any encountered girl friend obviously violetless.

As she turned the corner a gray figure, swinging a box, descended some steps and wheeled northward. She recognized cap and uniform. The young gentleman who forgot the violets, and on such a day! He hurried on ahead, whistling blithely about "Just One Girl." She strode after, an approaching Nemesis, welding him more closely at each step to the lost legion of cigarette smoking, novel reading messenger boys.

She was just despairing of his capture when, with a backward glance, he passed in at St. Catherine's.

She had explored several wards and was pausing irresolutely near the screened corner of another when a pasteboard cover on the floor met her eye. She stooped, then straightening, with an angry flush marched menacingly up to the screen and—drew back.

By a cot stood the gray uniform, head hung, fumbling his cap and shuffling his feet. Pillow propped sat a pop eyed, pigtailed little girl. She was grinning to the gums. One arm was bandaged; the other hugged to her nightgown a huge bunch of violets.

"An', say," she was confiding, between prodigious sniffs, "I wasn't reelee mad at you—not a bit!"

Outside Miss Dainton met the purple wagon. Its driver approached, grovelling.

"The matter is settled," she interrupted, loftily. "I have no complaint," and stalked on.